

First records of Chestnut Sparrow *Passer eminibey* for Chad

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Premières observations du Moineau d'Emin *Passer eminibey* au Tchad. Le 19 septembre 2015, une petite colonie de Moineaux d'Emin *Passer eminibey*, comprenant au moins 4–5 mâles adultes et deux femelles, a été découverte à Éredib, au centre du Tchad. En mars 2016 les oiseaux, comprenant des juvéniles, se trouvaient toujours au même endroit, tandis qu'un deuxième groupe fut trouvé à Abéché, 220 km à l'est. Ceci constituent les premières données pour le pays. La population la plus proche se trouve au Darfur, Soudan, à environ 500 km à l'est d'Éredib. L'acacia *Faidherbia albida* dans lequel les mâles paraient, abritait également 3–4 mâles et 2–3 femelles du Moineau domestique *P. domesticus*.

In the course of a field survey of the Ouadi Rimé-Ouadi Achim Game Reserve in central Chad, a small colony comprising at least 4–5 adult male and two female Chestnut Sparrows *Passer eminibey* was discovered at the small settlement of Éredib (13°33'37.9"N 18°55'33.6"E) on 19 September 2015. On returning to the site in March 2016 at least 10–15 birds were again present at the same location, while a second group of 5–10 was discovered at a work contractor's compound on the outskirts of Abéché (13°49'50.2"N 20°51'48.5"E), c.220 km east of Éredib. The Éredib site is in central Chad, 450 km east-northeast of the capital N'Djamena and 350 km west of the border with Sudan. The sparrows there were frequenting a small, inhabited, fenced compound enclosing a borehole with tower

reservoir at the edge of the village. They were evidently conditioned to human presence and were observed at close range.

In September the males stood out immediately by their uniform, rich chestnut plumage (Fig. 1) and characteristic display with raised quivering wings, showing pale undersides (Fig. 2). The displays were directed towards a single female and took place at a complex of dome-shaped nest structures constructed of grass stems in a tight mesh of thorny twigs within a spindly 5 m-tall winterthorn acacia *Faidherbia albida* sapling (Fig. 3). Also present at these nests were 3–4 adult male and 2–3 female House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*. Several bouts of chasing and aggressive interaction between males of the two species were noted, as well as chasing between male Chestnut Sparrows.



Figure 1. Male Chestnut Sparrow *Passer eminibey* in breeding plumage, Éredib, Chad, 19 September 2015 (Tim Wacher)

Moineau d'Emin *Passer eminibey* mâle en plumage nuptial, Éredib, Tchad, 19 septembre 2015 (Tim Wacher)



Figure 2. Male Chestnut Sparrow *Passer eminibey* displaying to female, Éredib, Chad, 19 September 2015 (Tim Wacher)

Moineau d'Emin *Passer eminibey* mâle paradant en face d'une femelle, Éredib, Tchad, 19 septembre 2015 (Tim Wacher)



Figure 3. Nests in *Faidherbia albida* where Chestnut Sparrows *Passer eminibey* were observed, Éredib, Chad, 19 September 2015 (Tim Wacher)

Nids dans un *Faidherbia albida* où les Moineaux d'Emin *Passer eminibey* ont été observés, Éredib, Tchad, 19 septembre 2015 (Tim Wacher)

Occasionally, the Chestnut Sparrows descended to an adjacent young desert date *Balanites aegyptiaca* tree to drop to the ground and drink at a pool created by a dripping tap within the compound.

Other species simultaneously present in the nest tree and adjacent *Balanites* included Northern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus*, Speckle-fronted Weaver *Sporopipes frontalis*, African Silverbill *Euodice cantans*, Cutthroat Finch *Amadina fasciata* and Ethiopian Swallow *Hirundo aethiopica*. Chestnut Sparrows are known to take over nests of weaver species, but also construct their own nests (Payne 1969, Urban 2004). It was unclear which of the species present was responsible for building the nests. Nevertheless, circumstantial evidence that Chestnut Sparrows were breeding at the site was strong. In March 2016 all birds were in non-breeding plumage, with some at Éredib showing signs of yellowish gape flanges. At Abéché the site was again shared with Northern Grey-headed Sparrow, House Sparrow, Cinnamon-breasted Rock Bunting *Emberiza tahapisi* and House Bunting *E. sahari*.

Chestnut Sparrow is not currently included on the ABC checklist for Chad (Dowsett *et al.* 2015) or treated in the main field guide to western Africa (Borrow & Demey 2014). The nearest known population is in Darfur, Sudan, c.500 km east of Éredib (Birdlife International 2015). Although the species is mainly sedentary, some individuals

wander extensively in the non-breeding season (Urban 2004).

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